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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000045

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER AND  
H FOR JENNIFER BUTTE-DAHL/MARK SMITH

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TAGS: [KPAL](#) [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: CODEL LYNCH MEETING WITH PM SINIORA

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On January 10, PM Siniora conveyed to CODEL Lynch his gratitude for U.S. economic, political, and military support.

He said the January 5 Arab League Foreign Ministers' communique was important, but that the opposition's interpretation of the communique, if implemented, would put handcuffs on the president-elect. He also said Arab League SYG Amr Moussa told him that the majority should have more than 10 cabinet seats and the minority should have fewer than

¶11. Siniora also described Lebanon as a battleground for Iran and Syria's fights with the U.S. and Israel. He offered his views on the continued Arab/Israeli conflict and said the GOL would rebuild the Nahr al-Barid camp, but security would be under the GOL's control in the future. End summary.

ARAB LEAGUE INITIATIVE

¶2. (C) Congressmen Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA), Peter Welch (D-VT), and Robert Wittman (R-VA), accompanied by staff, the Ambassador, and Emboffs, met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora at the Grand Serail on January 10. The Prime Minister was assisted by senior advisor Rola Nouraddine. Congressman Lynch told Siniora that Lebanon had the bipartisan support of the U.S. Congress. Siniora thanked the Congressmen for the USG's continued economic, political, and military support, especially over the past twelve months, in what Siniora deemed as "trying times."

¶3. (C) Congressman Lynch asked Siniora his thoughts on the Arab League's new initiative outlined in the Arab League Foreign Ministers' January 5 communique. Siniora said the communique clearly called for immediate presidential elections to occur, in accordance with the constitution; a cabinet distribution that does not give March 14 a two-thirds majority and that does not give March 8 a one-third blocking minority; and a new electoral law. Siniora said the Syrian-backed opposition was insisting on electing a president without amending the constitution and a 10-10-10 distribution of cabinet seats, even though Siniora said the foreign ministers' never discussed a 10-10-10 split at the Arab League meeting.

SLEIMAN'S ELECTION AND THE PRESIDENCY

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14. (C) In regards to presidential elections, Siniora explained that the best course of action for electing Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman would be with a constitutional amendment. He explained how Sleiman, as President, would have a sword dangling over his head if he were elected to the presidency without having the constitution amended. Siniora believed Sleiman would be under the constant threat of intimidation, because at any moment any parliamentarian could threaten to challenge Sleiman's legitimacy, making Sleiman susceptible to manipulation.

15. (C) He said the Syrian-backed opposition wanted to undermine the powers of the presidency. According to Siniora, agreements on the allocation of GOL ministries to certain parties puts "handcuffs" on Sleiman by not allowing him to freely sign off on the next Prime Minister's choice of cabinet ministers. The ability of the president to make appointments to important GOL institutions such as the LAF or the Central Bank of Lebanon will also be affected by the opposition's pre-conditions. He believed a presidential election was important because it would put constitutional institutions back to work.

AMR MOUSSA VISIT  
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16. (C) The Ambassador asked Siniora if Arab League SYG Amr Moussa would clarify the plan outlined in the Arab Foreign Ministers' communique during his January 9-10 visit to Beirut. In terms of the distribution of cabinet seats, Siniora said Moussa told him that he would not get into

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numbers, but that in any future national unity government, the majority should have more than 10 seats and the minority should have fewer than 11 seats. (Note: If the minority has 11 or more seats it will have the ability to block resolutions or topple the government. End Note.)

17. (C) Siniora believed Moussa was in Beirut to investigate different opinions and methods on how to constitutionally elect Sleiman to the presidency. He advised Moussa to convince Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri to open Parliament and allow the parliamentarians to decide how to elect Sleiman; either with a constitutional amendment or with a constitutional interpretation that avoids an amendment. (Note: Berri claims Article 74 of the constitution says procedures for amending the constitution do not need to be strictly adhered to in an "exceptional circumstance." Berri defines the presidential vacuum as an "exceptional circumstance"; therefore, he is arguing that Sleiman can be elected without amending the constitution. End Note.)

18. (C) Siniora said he will meet with Moussa the night of January 10 and will reiterate the importance of there being as little ambiguity as possible with regards to the distribution of cabinet seats and the election of Sleiman by constitutional means. Siniora added that Parliament Majority Leader Saad Hariri reiterated to Moussa the same idea in their meeting.

SYRIAN AND IRAN USING  
LEBANON AS A BATTLEGROUND  
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19. (C) According to Siniora, Iran and Syria continue to use Lebanon as a battleground for their individual conflicts against the U.S. and Israel. Iran has its nuclear agenda and its dream of regional domination, Siniora argued. He said Iran's mission in Lebanon was to defeat the U.S. and that Iran was using Hizballah to achieve this goal. He described how Hizballah is dependent upon Iran; financially, militarily, and ideologically.

¶10. (C) Syria has its own agenda in Lebanon, mainly trying to derail the Special Tribunal, according to Siniora. The Special Tribunal is important because it sends the message to Syria and the world that Lebanon is a place where impunity does not exist. He also mentioned that the Syrians were also using Hizballah as mechanism to attack Israel in order to influence Syrian-Israeli relations. Siniora noted that the Syrians claim that the Israelis are the ones responsible for the assassinations in Lebanon; however, Siniora posed a question asking "why is Syria so afraid of the Tribunal if the Israelis are behind the assassinations in Lebanon?"

¶11. (C) Siniora noted that Lebanon wants peaceful, diplomatic relations with Syria. However, Syria has to accept the fact that Lebanon is a free, independent, and sovereign nation. Congressman Lynch told Siniora that he and his colleagues would work to pass the latest iteration of the Syrian Accountability Act, in order to give the USG the ability to put more pressure on Syria to change its destabilizing policy in Lebanon.

#### ARAB/ISRAEL CONFLICT

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¶12. (C) Siniora told the CODEL that the Arab/Israeli conflict was the primary problem for the entire region. Siniora said the conflict was leading some Arab moderates to believe that there would never be a peaceful solution to the Palestinian's situation; therefore, the idea of an armed struggle is becoming more popular. Siniora also believed the Israeli occupation of Sheba Farms is giving Hizballah an excuse to hold on to its weapons because Hizballah claims that as long as Lebanese territory is occupied, it needs its weapons to defend Lebanon. Siniora also said that the 2002 Arab Peace initiative was a historic proposal that some Arab leaders are beginning to think should be taken off the table because little has come of it.

#### REFUGEE CAMPS

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¶13. (C) Siniora told the delegation that the GOL planned to  
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rebuild the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp, but that the future camp would be under the control of the GOL and the LAF rather than Palestinian security forces as before. Siniora said there were thirteen other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon that remained outside the control of the GOL and were described by Siniora as "mini-states within a state." He said the camps were becoming a magnet for outlaws and extremists; but he recognized that refugees in the camps were suffering and the only choice for many of the destitute refugees was to turn to extremists groups offering money.

#### HOW THE US CAN HELP

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¶14. (C) Congressman Lynch asked Siniora how the USG could help Lebanon during this current crisis. Siniora said that it would be important for the USG to support the work of the Arab League, so that its initiative will succeed. Siniora also said continued economic and military support for Lebanon, as well as financial support to rebuild the Nahr al-Barid camp and help Palestinians who live in the camp, would be important. Congressman Lynch also acknowledged the stunning performance by the LAF at Nahr al-Barid and offered the U.S. Congress's continued support for economic and military assistance to Lebanon.

¶15. (U) This message was not cleared by CODEL Lynch before it departed Beirut.  
FELTMAN